BC Assessment

2003 – 2005 SERVICE PLAN

We Value BC

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

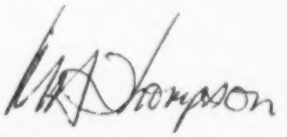
February 18, 2003

The Honourable Stan Hagen
Minister of Sustainable Resource Management
Legislative Buildings
Victoria, British Columbia V8V 1X4

Dear Minister:

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I have the pleasure to submit BC Assessment's 2003-2005 Service Plan.

This plan fulfills our obligation under the *Budget Transparency and Accountability* Act to provide a service plan with performance measures.



Mike Thompson
VICE CHAIR

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INTRODUCTION

BC Assessment is a Crown corporation that serves the people of British Columbia by producing and defending assessment rolls throughout the province. In addition, BC Assessment provides information to people to assist them in decisions that affect real property. BC Assessment estimates the market value of approximately 1.7 million properties in British Columbia through a fair, uniform, and equitable system. The assessment rolls provide the basis for generating over $4 billion in taxing revenue for local services and schools.

BC Assessment is now in its second year of implementing the strategic direction from the Core Services Review. Through this direction, BC Assessment has developed the following Service Plan for 2003 to 2005. This Service Plan is consistent with government's strategic plan and supports the government's vision, core values, and goals.

OVERVIEW OF THE ORGANIZATION

BC Assessment is a provincial Crown corporation established in 1974 to produce and maintain assessments that are uniform throughout the whole of British Columbia. The Board of Directors provides policy direction and performance review, while valuation and operational matters are the responsibility of the Chief Executive Officer and Assessment Commissioner.

BC Assessment's responsibilities are set out in two acts: the *Assessment Authority Act* and the *Assessment Act*. The *Assessment Authority Act* establishes BC Assessment as a corporation. This *Act* also provides for the appointment of a Board of Directors, Assessment Commissioner, and the funding of BC Assessment by property tax. The *Assessment Act* establishes the rules under which assessment rolls must be created. This *Act* also sets out the appeal process.

BC Assessment's core function is to establish and maintain uniform real property assessments throughout the province, using current market data as a guide. BC Assessment must also classify all real property according to use, produce the annual assessment rolls, and send assessment notices to all real property owners. The assessment rolls contain the actual value (estimated market value) of the land and improvements as well as the use classification and taxability of

OVERVIEW OF THE ORGANIZATION

approximately 1.7 million properties. For some properties the assessment roll contains values determined in accordance with prescribed rates and manuals approved by the Assessment Commissioner and regulations. Examples include farm land and major industrial property manuals.

A critical element of the system is that BC Assessment operates *independently* of the jurisdictions in British Columbia, including the provincial government, that levy property taxes.

BC Assessment currently employs 558 full-time staff in 22 offices throughout British Columbia. The organization currently consists of 21 assessment areas with assessment offices located throughout the province, and a Head Office in Victoria containing the following divisions to support the assessment offices – Assessment Administration; Assessment and Valuation Services; Policy, Audit and Legal Services; Corporate Services; and Community Relations and Marketing.

PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

BC Assessment's products and services are relied upon by British Columbia's citizens, their provincial, municipal, and regional governments, and other public bodies that generate real property tax revenue, including improvement districts, hospital boards, schools, and BC Transit. Property assessments form the basis of distributing property tax for 1,916 different taxing jurisdictions in British Columbia.

The assessment rolls provide an independent, fair, and equitable tax base from which local governments and the provincial government raise $4 billion annually in property taxes. Of this money, $2.3 billion is collected for local government and $1.7 billion is collected for schools and provincial general revenue. Property tax provides between 40 and 60 percent of funding for local governments and approximately 30 percent of funding for schools.

Annual Assessment Rolls

The assessment rolls contain the legal description, ownership, assessed value, use classification, and other details for every property in British Columbia. There are four types of rolls:

- ***The Completed Roll:*** this is completed by BC Assessment and approved by the Assessment Commissioner in December of each year for taxation in the following year;
- ***The Authenticated Roll:*** this includes amendments made by the Property Assessment Review Panels during February and March;

PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

- ***The Supplementary Rolls:*** these contain changes and corrections to the Authenticated Roll, and are issued between April and December; and

- ***The Grant Rolls:*** these contain the assessed value of properties that are exempt from property taxation, such as government properties, schools, and hospitals. They are produced annually and provided to exempt property owners and municipalities, and often provide a foundation for grants in lieu of property taxes.

Assessment Notices

BC Assessment provides each real property owner with a notice of assessed value of land and improvements. Approximately 1.7 million assessment notices are sent by mail by December 31st of each year. For the 2003 assessment notice, all property owners will have the option of receiving their notice electronically, through *epost*™.

For the majority of properties, the assessment is the estimation of a property's market value as of July 1st each year. **This means that assessment notices mailed in December of each year reflect the value six months earlier.**

Community and Social Initiatives

BC Assessment provides community and social initiatives in British Columbia through consultation with local governments and other stakeholders and through the review of all of its operations for social and environmental impacts.

BC Assessment supports the Integrated Cadastral Initiative (ICI), a partnership of public and private sectors to create, manage, and distribute a database that consists of the integrated parcel fabric and related parcel links on a province-wide basis. The Integrated Cadastral Information Society,

PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

a not for profit society, was created to manage the business of the partnership.

First Nations Assessment Rolls

BC Assessment provides assessment rolls on a contract basis to 48 of the 51 First Nations that have authority to establish independent real property taxation systems.

Statutory Reports

These reports provide value summaries for specific taxation purposes, such as funding for school districts, regional districts, local areas, and hospital and transit services.

Commercial Products and Services

BC Assessment provides several products and services available for a fee. These include access through BC OnLine to the published assessment roll, provision of bulk electronic assessment rolls, sales data and residential inventory data, custom reports, and professional consulting services.

Communications

Improving communication is an important key to the relationship between BC Assessment and our stakeholders, as well as an important operational issue between offices and departments. BC Assessment provides information to the public through the internet by a home web page (www.bcassessment.bc.ca); by support for CivicInfo BC (www.civicinfo.bc.ca), which is a comprehensive local government information sharing site; through inclusion of assessment information on BC OnLine (www.bconline.gov.bc.ca); and through various publications and reports. Information on property assessments is provided in several languages on request at all the Area Offices throughout the province.

REVIEW PROCESS

BC Assessment advances the broad public interest by ensuring that the assessment roll accurately represents values and therefore provides an equitable basis for property taxation. Fairness is a hallmark for BC Assessment employees in their service to the community.

Property owners who question the accuracy or fairness of their assessment often resolve these issues by meeting with staff at BC Assessment's local offices. If issues are not resolved, property owners may seek a review by independent tribunals. The first level of appeal is to the Property Assessment Review Panel. The second level of appeal is to the Property Assessment Appeal Board. These appeal tribunals, which are administered by the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management, are independent of BC Assessment and the taxing jurisdictions. Higher courts hear appeals based on matters of law.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

VISION

We will be the leading property assessment organization internationally and the first choice for property information in British Columbia.

MISSION

We produce uniform property assessments that form the basis for local and provincial taxation while providing information to assist people when making real estate decisions.

VALUES

We are guided by our commitment to: QUALITY in our products, services, and work life; ACCOUNTABILITY for our actions and results; SERVICE that is responsive and sensitive; and TEAMWORK in working together as one team and partnering with our clients.

QUALITY, ACCOUNTABILITY, SERVICE, TEAMWORK.

PLANNING CONTEXT AND KEY STRATEGIC ISSUES

Changing Stakeholder Expectations

BC Assessment's stakeholders are continually increasing their expectations for products, services, and assessment roll quality. Local governments, taxpayers, and commercial stakeholders are placing higher demands on the assessment roll with regard to uniformity, consistency, and accuracy. The provincial government has increasing expectations and requirements of Crown corporations. For BC Assessment, these include reporting its financial responsibilities, overview of strategic planning and performance monitoring and making these documents available to the public, and advancement of broader social, environmental, and economic development objectives. In meeting these expectations, BC Assessment must maintain the independence of the assessment function.

Demographics and Succession Planning

The population demographics for British Columbia indicate an aging population. This is reflected in the workforce of BC Assessment and over the next five years approximately 20 percent of staff will be eligible to retire. The projected number of possible retirements creates several important challenges and opportunities and highlights the need for the ongoing succession program.

PLANNING CONTEXT AND KEY STRATEGIC ISSUES

Changing Staff Expectations

In today's workplace, employees expect meaningful work, empowerment, positive leadership, and growth in learning. BC Assessment continues to address these expectations through progressive human resources initiatives while maintaining a high and consistent level of service to our clients.

Financial Constraints

Given the fact that BC Assessment is reliant on property taxation revenues for the largest part of its revenues, BC Assessment is subject to fiscal constraints and must become increasingly more efficient and cost-effective in its operation. The number of properties that must be assessed annually will continue to grow. In spite of the minimal cost to taxpayers, BC Assessment is committed to reducing its reliance on taxpayers through implementing cost-effective operations and creative and effective marketing initiatives.

Training and Staff Development

The changing expectations of our stakeholders require staff training that is high in quality, provides mentoring and support, is timely, and is effective. The training plan provides the direction for current and future training needs at BC Assessment. BC Assessment will promote leadership in staff development to fulfill its current and future training needs.

PLANNING CONTEXT AND KEY STRATEGIC ISSUES

Technology

Technological change is continuing to impact the assessment field. It is creating opportunities for greater efficiency as well as challenges in terms of capital costs and staff training. Our current legacy information system is not flexible enough to meet the current and future operational and marketing needs. A new information system will be implemented during the life of this plan.

Managing Change

Change is the norm in today's world. BC Assessment is addressing change, both internally and externally, through leadership in strategic direction as presented through BC Assessment's 2003-2005 Service Plan and includes service delivery models; E-commerce and access to information; partnerships, links, and shared services; self-reporting of information; plain language legislation; and a streamlined, integrated, and efficient appeal system. Major initiatives in these objectives include planning and implementing a new information system, implementing Continuous Improvement Measures, providing succession planning and implementation, creating educational programs, and reviewing and implementing valuation policy. BC Assessment will also manage change with our external stakeholders through partnerships with local governments and clients.

Community Relations

Increasingly, BC Assessment will need to be competitively minded and flexible in order to develop more partnership opportunities in today's market. BC Assessment will continue its support to local governments and the communities that they support.

PLANNING CONTEXT AND KEY STRATEGIC ISSUES

Marketing

BC Assessment has put in place an executive management structure to enhance its marketing endeavours. With an emphasis on new marketing initiatives, BC Assessment will reduce its already small reliance on taxation revenues.

First Nations Issues

First Nations of British Columbia are assuming property taxation responsibilities traditionally provided by the provincial and local governments. As property taxation becomes increasingly important, opportunities will be created for BC Assessment to strengthen and expand its relations with First Nations. Services that can be provided include consultation, assessment, and related products.

Information Transparency

Our stakeholders must have confidence in the products and services that we provide. Access to information is an important key to the relationship between BC Assessment and our clients, as well as an important operational issue between offices and departments. BC Assessment is committed to providing quality information to our stakeholders. BC Assessment, through a new information system, will ensure greater public access to electronic data through the Internet.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, PERFORMANCE MEASURES, AND TARGETS

To fulfill our mandate and to reach our vision, BC Assessment has established four key goals:

PRODUCT QUALITY AND UNIFORMITY:
Our products will be of the highest quality and uniform throughout the province.

CUSTOMER SERVICE AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS:
We will provide a level of service that exceeds our customers' expectations and help strengthen the communities we serve.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY:
The average per property cost for assessment services will be reduced for the taxpayer.

HUMAN RESOURCES LEADERSHIP:
We will foster a climate that encourages professional development, continuing corporate success, and commitment to our shared vision.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, PERFORMANCE MEASURES, AND TARGETS

From these goals, six objectives, or strategic directions, were developed.

- Service Delivery
- E-commerce and Access to Information
- Partnerships/Links/ Shared Services
- Self-reporting of Information
- Plain Language Legislation
- Streamlined, Integrated, and Efficient Appeal System

Within each objective, BC Assessment has established targets from 2003 through the year 2005. Over this time frame, BC Assessment will consider what is working, what is not, and where limited resources can be utilized in the most relevant and effective manner. This requires a focus on results. Targets have therefore been established to track progress and to indicate when results meet planned objectives. Performance measures have been developed to measure the quality of the assessment roll. These are the median *Assessment-to-Sales Ratio*, the *Coefficient of Dispersion*, and the *Price-Related Differential*. These measures form the basis for evaluation of the critical performance targets (see Appendix A for an explanation of these performance measures).

OBJECTIVE - SERVICE DELIVERY:

BC Assessment will provide significant opportunities for service delivery while ensuring our products will be of the highest quality and uniform throughout the province.

TARGET – By 2004, BC Assessment will develop improvement plans for implementation of:

- inventory collection;
- application of regulated rates to major industrial properties;
- application of regulated rates to continuous structures;
- application of regulated rates to farms and forests;
- research; and
- support services.

TARGET – The median *Assessment-to-Sales Ratio* for the residential assessment roll in British Columbia will be 97 percent.

TARGET – The *Coefficient of Dispersion* for the provincial assessment roll will be less than 10 percent for homogeneous residential regions and less than 15 percent for heterogeneous residential regions.

TARGET – The *Price-Related Differential* will be between 0.98 and 1.03 for residential properties.

TARGET –The responsibility for major property types will be shifted to specialized teams by the end of 2003.

TARGET – By the end of 2004, office accommodation efficiencies will be implemented.

OBJECTIVE - E-COMMERCE AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION:

BC Assessment will meet our customers' needs by providing greater electronic access to data, sharing data with partners, and enhancing the analysis of data.

TARGET – By the end of 2003, BC Assessment will implement advanced measurement programs to ensure uniformity of assessment data/information.

TARGET – By the end of 2005, BC Assessment will implement a new information system that will include:

- ensuring public access to electronic data through the Internet;
- providing a valuation system that enables analysis; and
- providing integration with geographical information systems.

OBJECTIVE - PARTNERSHIPS/ LINKS/SHARED SERVICES:

BC Assessment will enhance links and partnerships leading to greater efficiencies.

TARGET – By the end of 2004, develop greater links and partnerships with local governments, First Nations, the provincial government, and private sector leading to more efficient and more accurate valuation information.

TARGET – By the end of 2005, BC Assessment will share or partner support services through specific shared projects identified in an implementation plan.

TARGET – By 2004, non-tax revenues for BC Assessment will be increased to $3.6 million.

OBJECTIVE - SELF-REPORTING OF INFORMATION:

BC Assessment will encourage property owners to access their data and input information directly to our system.

TARGET – Commencing in 2003, property owners will have access to our systems for updating their property information.

OBJECTIVE – PLAIN LANGUAGE LEGISLATION:

BC Assessment will recommend to government changes to assessment legislation that are clear, concise, and simplified.

TARGET – By the end of 2003, BC Assessment will make recommendations to rewrite the *Assessment Act* and Regulations to clarify and simplify the *Act's* wording so that it is better understood by all taxpayers.

OBJECTIVE – STREAMLINED, INTEGRATED, AND EFFICIENT APPEAL SYSTEM:

BC Assessment will continue to recommend to government changes to the appeal system that streamline the appeal process while protecting the rights of the taxpayers to appeal their property tax assessments

TARGET – Each year, 98 percent of residential assessments will be accepted without referral by the public to the Property Assessment Review Panel.

TARGET – Each year, 95 percent of non-residential assessments will be accepted without referral by the public to the Property Assessment Review Panel.

TARGET – During 2003, direction from government with regard to streamlining the appeal process will be implemented to reduce internal costs on complaints and appeals.

ALIGNMENT WITH GOVERNMENT'S STRATEGIC PLAN

BC Assessment supports the government's vision and core values through its vision, mission, and values. BC Assessment's values of quality, accountability, service, and teamwork accentuate the government's stated values of integrity, fiscal responsibility, accountability, respect, and choice.

This Service Plan is consistent with government's strategic plan and supports the three provincial goals of a strong and vibrant provincial economy; a supportive social infrastructure; and safe, healthy communities and a sustainable environment.
BC Assessment produces fair, equitable, and uniform property assessments that provide the basis upon which local governments and other authorities raise approximately $4 billion dollars to support a multitude of public services. Through this process, BC Assessment supports the provincial economy and the communities of British Columbia.

BC Assessment has established four key goals: product quality and uniformity; customer service and community relations; fiscal responsibility; and human resources leadership. From these goals, six objectives were developed. These objectives are related to the objectives that the government developed for their three provincial goals.
BC Assessment's objectives of service delivery; e-commerce and access to information; partnerships/links/shared

ALIGNMENT WITH GOVERNMENT'S STRATEGIC PLAN

services; self-reporting of information; plain language legislation; and streamlined, integrated, and efficient appeal system describe how BC Assessment will deliver services to the communities and people of our province.

BC Assessment used the government strategic plan as the guiding document to develop this strategic plan that outlines the goals, objectives, performance measures, and targets for this Crown agency. As with the government, BC Assessment's goals and objectives were developed in the context of fiscal responsibility and maintaining the support for communities that provide services for health and education.

SUMMARY FINANCIAL OUTLOOK

The following table gives the high level financial revenue and expenditure forecast for 2002 -2005, as well as key forecast assumptions and risks

Summary Financial Outlook for the 2002-2005 Service Plan

(Thousands of dollars)	2002 FORECAST	2003 FORECAST	2004 FORECAST	2005 FORECAST
REVENUE:				
Tax levies	62,213	61,903	61,590	61,300
Other	2,876	3,297	3,610	3,900
Interest	450	300	300	300
	65,539	65,500	65,500	65,500
EXPENDITURE:				
Salaries and benefits	45,503	43,257	43,873	44,500
Office premises	4,599	4,772	4,603	4,421
Professional and special services	4,964	6,680	6,315	6,136
Office	2,892	4,066	4,125	4,224
Travel	1,868	2,962	2,926	2,962
Appeal costs	1,632	1,800	1,800	1,800
Interest	76	100	102	104
Amortization	2,579	3,239	3,144	2,900
	64,113	66,876	66,888	67,047
Excess (deficiency) of revenue over expenditure	1,426	(1,376)	(1,388)	(1,549)

SUMMARY FINANCIAL OUTLOOK

Forecast Risks and Sensitivities:

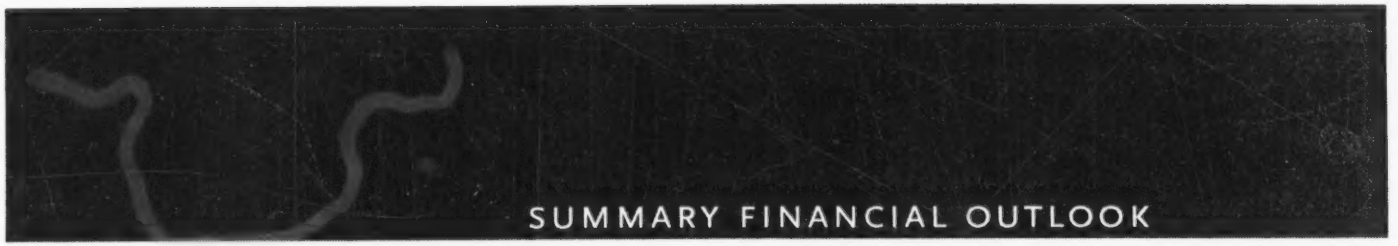
- BC Assessment is addressing significant change through its 2003-2005 Service Plan including: new service delivery models; E-Commerce and access to information; self-reporting of information; plain language legislation; and a streamlined, integrated, and efficient appeal system. Major initiatives include implementing a new information system, implementing Continuous Improvement Measures, succession planning and implementation, educational programs, and implementing valuation policy. To mitigate risks inherent in these significant projects, BC Assessment follows a rigorous project management discipline.
- Appeals to the Property Assessment Review Panels and Property Assessment Appeal Board have been stable for the 2001 and 2002 Assessment Rolls. Appeals often increase in years with increased values, and the 2003 assessment roll indicates an overall increase in values.

Key Assumptions:

- BC Assessment has a December 31 fiscal year end.
- Non-levy revenue will grow to $3.9 million by the end of 2005.
- Tax levies are adjusted annually so total revenues do not exceed $65.5 million during the planning period. The tax levy is adjusted downward as marketing revenues increase.

SUMMARY FINANCIAL OUTLOOK

- BC Assessment budgeted significant expenditures towards technology and system upgrades over the four years to December 31, 2005. The Board of Directors has established that the funding for these costs is to be provided from accumulated equity from operations. The planned losses forecast for 2003 – 2005 result from inclusion of the expenditures in support of these technology and system upgrades. The accumulated equity from operations is adequate to cover these losses.
- The corporation borrows funds to finance operations and capital expenses during the first half of each fiscal year and repays debt from the proceeds of taxes at the end of July.
- Salaries and benefits for 2003 are forecast to support approximately 558 full-time equivalent (FTE) and the FTE of 84 temporary employees, the majority being property inventory collectors. A long term staffing plan will be completed in the first quarter of 2003.
- Professional and special services increase during the planning period in support of the implementation of the Information Systems Plan (including the new assessment system), and consulting fees in support of service delivery initiatives.
- Office costs include software maintenance costs for the new assessment system.



SUMMARY FINANCIAL OUTLOOK

- Travel costs for 2002 were well below normal while BC Assessment underwent a 20 percent reduction in regular staffing and significant resources were assigned to initiatives in support of the Information System Plan. For the years 2003-2005, regular assessment work and related travel will resume as inventory collection returns to normal levels.
- New assessment system software has been purchased and customization is underway. The multi-year plan includes assumptions regarding acquisition of the infrastructure (servers and operations software) to run the system. BC Assessment may use a service provider instead. This may shift expenditures from capital (and amortization) to special service expenses.
- BC Assessment will:
  - continue to exceed the International Association of Assessing Officers standards for assessment roll quality. These performance measures are *Assessment-to-Sales Ratio*, *Coefficient of Dispersion*, and *Price-Related Differential*.
  - continue to exceed our stakeholders' expectations for service.
  - continue to fund the complaint and appeal process.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Assessment Roll Quality Measures

The most important and widely accepted statistical measures of the quality of the assessment roll are the median *Assessment-to-Sales Ratio* (ASR), the *Coefficient of Dispersion* (COD) and the *Price-Related Differential* (PRD). The International Association of Assessing Officers (IAAO) has set standards for each of these statistical measures. These form the basis of the critical performance targets.

The reliability of these measures is founded on the records as provided by the Land Title Office. The results compare the market value transactions as registered in the Land Title Office against the actual value as determined by the appraisers in BC Assessment.

i. Assessment-to-Sales Ratio

The ASR is calculated by dividing the actual value (as determined by BC Assessment) of a property that has sold by its selling price, and expressing the result as a percentage. For example, if BC Assessment assessed a property with a value of $243,000, and it sold for $250,000, the ASR would be 97.2 percent.

The IAAO has set a standard for a median ASR of 90 percent to 110 percent for an acceptable level of assessment achievement. BC Assessment's target of 97 percent exceeds this standard.

ii. Coefficient of Dispersion

The COD measures how closely a group of numbers is clustered around its median, or middle number. The lower the COD, the better quality the product.

The COD standard set by the IAAO for single family residential properties is under 15 percent for homogeneous regions and under 20 percent for heterogeneous regions. BC Assessment has set targets of under 10 percent and under 15 percent respectively.

iii. Price-Related Differential

The PRD measures the progressivity or regressivity of assessments. Assessments are said to be regressive if high-value properties are under-appraised relative to low-value properties, and progressive if high-value properties are over-appraised relative to low-value properties. Significant progressivity or regressivity results in inequitable distribution of the tax burden. A good quality assessment roll should show no sign of regressivity or progressivity.

The IAAO standard for the PRD is between 0.98 and 1.03. A PRD under 0.98 indicates progressivity; over 1.03 indicates regressivity. BC Assessment has adopted the IAAO standard for the PRD.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX B: 2003 Completed Assessment Roll Results

The following table summarizes the provincial results for single family residential properties. These properties represent 57.7 percent of the parcels in BC and 53.0 percent of the market derived value on the Assessment Roll.

For the province, from April 1, 2002 until September 30, 2002, 96.0 percent of sales value was captured on the Assessment Roll ($11.522 billion actual value/ $12.000 billion sales prices).

APPENDICES

ROLL QUALITY – 2003 COMPLETED ROLL

Single Family Residential Property

JURISDICTION TYPE	SALES (APR-SEPT)	MEDIAN ASR	COD	PRD
All Jurisdictions	31,841	96.5%	5.7%	1.006
City	18,042	96.6%	5.3%	1.006
District	8,926	96.5%	5.6%	1.007
Town	1,128	96.4%	6.3%	1.007
Village	464	96.6%	8.5%	1.013
Rural	3,281	95.7%	7.8%	1.014

VERTICAL ANALYSIS

CATEGORY	SALES (APR-SEPT)	MEDIAN ASR	COD	PRD
Low End Housing (Manual class: 030s to 060s and 080s to 090s)	10,200	96.4%	6.6%	1.009
Mid Range Housing (Manual class: 140s and 150s)	20,641	96.5%	5.3%	1.005
High End Housing (Manual class: 070s, and 160s and above)	919	96.3%	6.0%	1.008

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